



*2023*

***DOWNTOWN BUSINESS  
STRATEGIC PLAN***

CITY OF SYLVANIA, GA

Downtown Development Authority

# Acknowledgement

## **Downtown Development Authority**

Kylie Forehand, Executive Director  
Brooke Lawn - Chair  
Angie Johnson - Secretary/Treasurer  
Mayor Preston Dees  
Dorie Bacon  
Hugh Hunter  
Chris Griner  
Michael Wrachford

## **Electric Cities of Georgia**

Michelle Holbrook  
Morgan Ferguson  
Jon McBrayer

## **Georgia Department of Community Affairs**

Cherie Bennett  
Elizabeth Bennett



## **City of Sylvania Mayor & City Manager**

Preston Dees  
Stacy Mathis

## **Screven County Development Authority**

Rachel Barnwell

## **Coastal Regional Commission of Georgia**

Aaron Carpenter

**City of Sylvania, Screven County Development  
Authority, Downtown Development Authority  
Public Participation Geographic Information  
Systems Geographic Information Systems  
Project Team**

Completed for the City of Sylvania Downtown Development Authority by Dr. Michelle M. Thompson

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## **Introduction / Project Background / Sylvania History Then & Now**

### **Purpose**

The 2023 Sylvania Downtown Business Strategic *Plan* is intended to provide a vision, with specific goals, recommendations, and implementation steps to guide and stimulate downtown development. The 2023 Sylvania Downtown Business Strategic Plan builds off the goals established in the 2019 Downtown Strategic Plan and the 2015 Sylvania Comprehensive Plan. Both plans set forth priorities related to business expansion/maintenance, economic development, and downtown design. Since many of the goals and action items in the 2015 Comprehensive Plan have been advanced, the Screven County Comprehensive Plan (which includes the City of Sylvania) was extended from 2020 to 2040.

The Downtown Development Authority determined that an update to the 2019 downtown strategic plan was necessary. A comprehensive study was completed in 2022 through spring 2023 to analyze and report on the status of the downtown business environment and create a plan that supports existing, and encourages new, business expansion. This report provides the results of these activities and will serve as a guide to improving the downtown, expand/maintain businesses, and work on a shared goal of the City of Sylvania and Screven County as a “*great place to do business, live, work, play and visit.*”

### **Process**

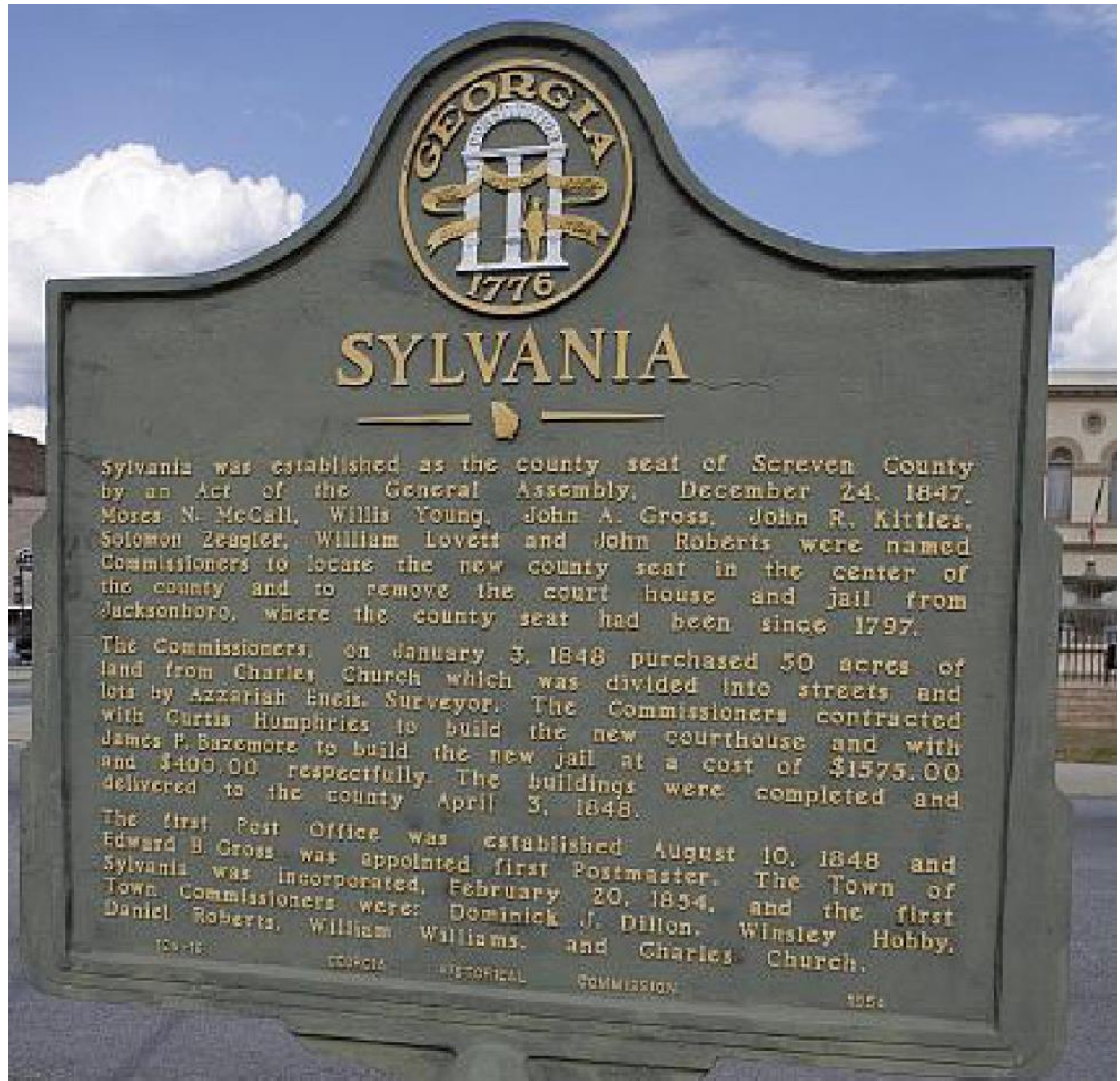
The 2023 Sylvania Downtown Business Strategic Plan emerged over four phases: (1) needs identification, (2) community engagement, (3) plan and design, and (4) refinement of 2023 plan. The plan review was initiated by Downtown Development Authority (DDA), in cooperation with the City of Sylvania, in the first quarter of 2022. During the third quarter of 2022 through the first quarter of 2023, the City of Sylvania, Screven County Development Authority, and the Sylvania Downtown Development Authority partnered with Georgia Southern University and the University of New Orleans to research downtown history, analyze existing conditions, conduct a public engagement process, and provide an update to prior documents. During the second quarter of 2023, the Downtown Development Authority conducted a *Downtown Business Survey* which aided in developing specific plans for supporting existing businesses.

The DDA worked closely with the City of Sylvania to ensure that the community participation was at the forefront of the planning process. By using a *public participation geographic information systems (PPGIS)* approach, the project used various data collection methods, including in-person and online surveys about general downtown development improvements, business assets/needs and infrastructure design preferences. The draft 2023 Strategic Work Plan was shared, and feedback requested, at a Community Meeting on April 19, 2023 where the City of Sylvania announced plans for a business incubator and application for a Rural Zone tax incentive for businesses.

The 2023 *Sylvania Downtown Business Strategic Plan* includes a comprehensive approach focusing on maintenance and expansion of existing businesses while encouraging new business development. Public dissemination of the draft plan was announced at the April community meeting, posted on municipal websites, shared through social media and the local and regional press. A request for community input was available through an online form or by contacting the DDA Office. The completed plan includes the following elements: an analysis of existing property and market conditions, description of the existing and future community engagement process, and a series of recommendations and action steps to implement the community's goals.

### Vision for Downtown Sylvania

“Downtown Sylvania is a diverse and welcoming destination where people live, work and play. The vision blends economic and community development creating an environment that will grow and sustain a prosperous community while maintaining the best small-town characteristics.”





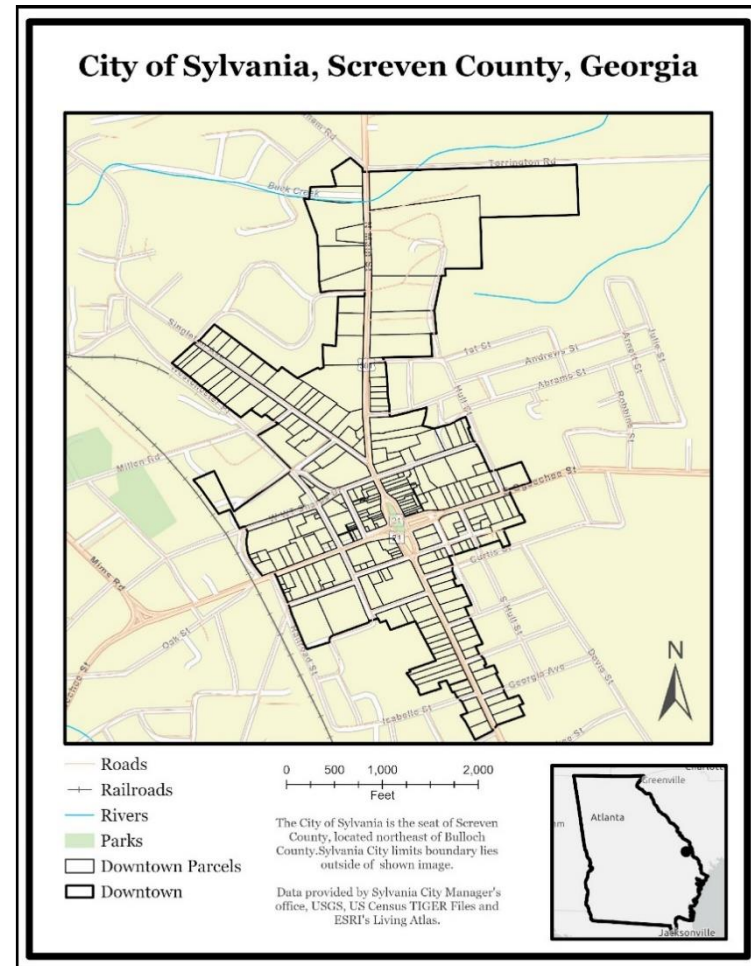
## Regional Context

The City of Sylvania is located in southeast Georgia. The City of Sylvania's estimated 2022 population of 2,646 is almost the same as the city's 2020 population of 2,634. It is the county seat of Screven County, which is the 14th largest county in Georgia by population. Surrounding much of Sylvania is agricultural land and rural development.

Sylvania is 55 miles southeast of Augusta and 58 miles northwest of Savannah. Sylvania is 75 miles from Tybee Island off the coast of Savannah and 80 miles from Hilton Head Island, South Carolina.



Atlanta is 210 miles northwest of Sylvania and Jacksonville, Florida is 185 miles south. Historic U.S. Highway 301 is the main route through Sylvania. Interstate 95 is the closest interstate highway and is 50 miles from the downtown. The closest international airport is the Savannah-Hilton Head Airport in Savannah, GA. Highway 21 provides interstate access and offers 4 lanes from Sylvania to the Port of Savannah and to Augusta. The maps provide an outline of the Sylvania downtown which also serves as the Downtown Development Authority target area.







The aerial photograph is a drone flyover of Sylvania downtown with the fountain at center. (PPGIS, spring 2023)



## Historic Context

The City of Sylvania has a long history as a community hub within the southeastern part of the state. Over the years, Sylvania has been called the "*Azalea and Dogwood City*" and the "*Welcome Station City*" due to its strategic location along major transportation routes. The Welcome Center is the oldest known in the State of Georgia. From relatively modest beginnings, the City of Sylvania has become a stable community with a moderately prosperous local economy. Today, the city self-styles itself as a "*great place to do business, live, work, play and visit*" which describes the city's desire to grow, while celebrating its' history and goal to improve the community's future.

## Early Sylvania

Indigenous Americans who settled in the area known today as Screven County were the Yamassees, Creeks, and the Cherokee (Hollingsworth, Thompson, & Lee, 1989). The Yamassees were part of the Creeks tribe. In 1715, the Yamassees War broke out against the Cherokees in (South) Carolina. The Creeks encouraged the war, which was against their neutrality. The Indigenous Americans of the Carolinas had more advanced weapons, which aided the war to their benefit. To restore peace in 1717 between the tribes of the Yamasses and the Cherokees, a peace treaty was signed. After the war, the Yamassees retreated to Florida to live under colonial Spanish rule, and the Creeks moved from Oconee and Ocmulgee Rivers to the Chattahoochee River. In 1732 the first English colonists arrived in present-day Savannah. The first Englishman to arrive in Screven County is said to be Henry Woodward. The early colonists commanded by James Oglethorpe, the founder of the colony of Georgia. Sylvania was the center of business for the new county, attracting lawyers, teachers, and store owners.

## Battle of Brier Creek

Georgia was the last of the original thirteen colonies to be founded in what is the present-day United States of America. In its transition from a British colony to a state in a newly formed nation, colonists participated in the American Revolution. During this transitional period, two Georgians, Abraham Baldwin, and William Few Jr., signed the new U.S. Constitution at the Constitutional Convention making Georgia the fourth state to enter the Union when the Constitution was ratified on January 2, 1788 (Cobb & Inscoe, 2020). With Georgia signing and pledging allegiance to the newly formed Union, they took a stance against British rule and fought for their independence during the American Revolution. The American Revolution came close to home to Sylvania during the Battle of Brier Creek. During this battle, British troops under the command of Colonel Provost would march his men up the south side of Brier Creek on March 1, 1779. To slow the British troops, American soldiers destroyed a bridge that crossed the creek at Paris Mill. The British were not to be thwarted and made a makeshift bridge enabling them to cross the creek by the evening of March 2nd. British troops attacked American troops by surprise and won a swift victory by 3:00 pm on March 3, 1779. (Hollingsworth, 1979). This British victory is memorialized on a mural on a side of the Clark Family Care building in downtown Sylvania.



The **Battle of Brier Creek** mural is on *Georgia Mural Trail* and is on the *American Mural Trail*.



The county of Screven, home of Sylvania, is named for an American Revolutionary War hero - General James Screven (Genealogy Trails, 2023). The next time Screven County would see battle would be in another 85 years during the Civil War with General William T. Sherman's March to the Sea. Sherman's march was the most destructive against a civilian population during the Civil War that began in Atlanta on November 15, 1864 and ended in Savannah on December 21, 1864 (Bailey, 2020). As General Sherman passed through Screven County, he made an order forbidding random destruction. This meant the troops were prohibited from trespassing or entering any home. However, they could collect food or supplies from the side of the road or if it was in sight (Hollingsworth, Thompson, & Lee, 1989).

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The exact date of Sylvania's first European settlement is unknown; however, the state legislature moved the Screven County seat to Sylvania from its former location at Jacksonborough in 1847. The land that makes up Sylvania was purchased from Charles Church for one dollar per acre. Sylvania was incorporated in 1854, and its name was derived from the Latin word for forest and suggested by Screven County poet Cuyler Young (Brown, 2022).



**Downtown Sylvania yesterday...**



**Downtown Sylvania today!**





# **Downtown Sylvania Today**

## **Built Environment & Uses / Downtown Infrastructure**

The City of Sylvania will work with the Downtown Development Authority to highlight, in written and social media, the downtown and city-wide infrastructure improvements and plans:

### **Electric**

The City of Sylvania is the electric provider for the downtown district and the entire City. There are ample resources to serve any future growth in the downtown through the City's electrical grid. The City's delivered power is 71% emissions-free. The City is a member of the *Municipal Electric Authority of Georgia* (MEAG) Power. MEAG Power is a nonprofit, statewide generation, and transmission organization. Recognized as one of the leading joint action agencies in the country, MEAG Power is among the top public power companies nationwide in terms of annual net generation, megawatt-hour sales and electric revenue. Its diverse, clean energy portfolio compares favorably with both the state and national averages. Created by the Georgia General Assembly in 1975, MEAG Power provides reliable, competitive wholesale electricity to its 49 member communities (Participants), who own and operate their local electric distribution systems. MEAG Power also monitors and advocates on energy issues at the state and federal levels on behalf of its Participants.

### **Natural Gas**

The City of Sylvania Gas Division provides safe, clean, efficient, reliable energy at reasonable cost to about 600 customers which includes the City's downtown district. The City is a member of the Gas Authority. The Gas Authority was formed in 1987 by an Act of the Georgia General Assembly to assist municipal members who own and operate natural gas distribution systems. Member and municipal customer systems are located on the pipeline facilities of 12 interstate pipelines. The Gas Authority provides a broad array of gas supply, marketing, and other related services, which deliver significant benefits to its members, municipal customers and the communities they serve.

### **Water & Sewer**

The City of Sylvania has adequate water and sewer infrastructure to serve any new downtown developments in the future. The current system is more than adequate to service our current residents and businesses, as well as any others that could be added into the vacant lots and buildings in downtown. The sewer lines are old. A maintenance schedule has been established to examine and clean out lines. The city provides infrastructure and services well beyond our city limits.

### **Storm Drains**

There are storm drains and ditching throughout downtown. There is an area along Ennis Street that during large rain events overflows. Engineers are examining ways to mitigate this issue.

## Future Revitalization

The city has been approved for a *Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP)* grant through the Georgia Department of Transportation for 2,290 linear feet of new sidewalk and streetscape in the Sylvania downtown district. The award is for Professional Engineering (PE) funds in the amount of \$400,000 (80% federal: \$320,000 & 20% local match: \$80,000). The City must provide a financial match to the State *Transportation Special Purpose Local Option Sales Tax (TSPLOST)* funds. The downtown historic theater was owned by the City and DDA. In 2022, a private investor purchased the theater with plans to develop it into an event venue. The investor was required to put down a nonrefundable deposit of \$25,000. The deal is contingent upon the theater being renovated based on the DDA approved design and the investor must have the project completed by March 2024.

## Broadband

The City of Sylvania is part of the State of Georgia internet broadband initiative. The Planters Broadband Cooperative provides 10 gig availability to businesses and 1 gig at all residential locations in Sylvania.

## Development Character

Downtown Sylvania has a varied, somewhat fragmented street grid. There is no standard block length. The image shows a view from the Sylvania water tower looking east towards the downtown of Sylvania. There are solid blocks with connecting stores, as well as stand-alone structures. The height of buildings varies with maximums which don't exceed the height of the church steeple and/or *Marquee on Main* building. The lot sizes vary, there is limited undeveloped land or parking lots. There are municipal buildings and public green spaces. Walkability has improved with accessible sidewalks. There is a partial round-about in the city center that has adequate signage to regulate passive traffic flows.



# Land Use

## Commercial Development

The commercial development includes retail shops, restaurants, personal care services, automotive services, and professional services. There are banks, medical related businesses, realtor, legal and insurance firms. Retail uses are the next largest commercial uses. Retail uses include specialty retail establishments such as pharmacies. Restaurants comprise the least use.

## Residential Development

There are residential uses, primarily homes, scattered throughout the district. Many of these dwellings are single family with larger lots and set back from the main roadways.

## Civic Development

Civic uses include the Mayors' office, City Hall, Chamber of Commerce, Downtown Development Authority, Screven County Development Authority and the US Federal Post Office.

## Undeveloped Land

There are a limited number of public and private undeveloped land in the downtown area.

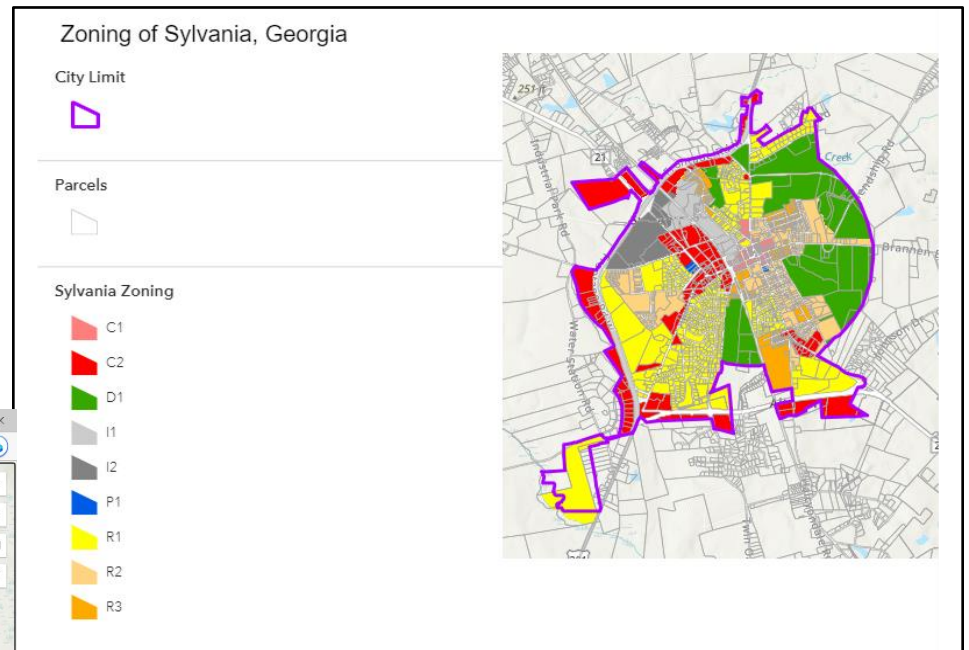
## Religious Institutions

There are religious institutions that hold both buildings and parking lots in the downtown.

## Zoning

The City of Sylvania Zoning overall map, and zoomed in Downtown, denote a mix of existing land uses which includes development (D1) of green spaces. The downtown has a majority as commercial (C1) followed by residential (R1-R2).

The City of Sylvania Zoning map can be found here:  
<https://segrass.maps.arcgis.com/apps/instant/basic/index.html?appid=8e330652b49f45ea8af3d3247892fc11>

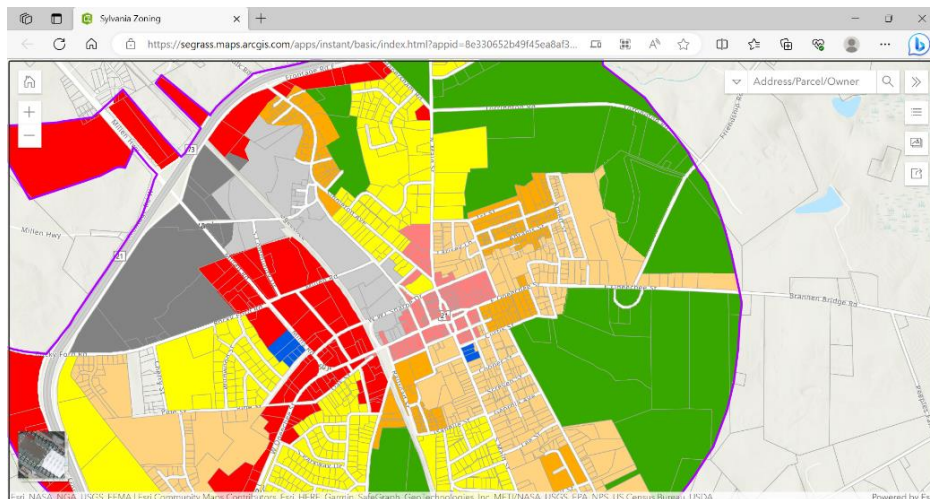


[652b49f45ea8af3d3247892fc11](https://segrass.maps.arcgis.com/apps/instant/basic/index.html?appid=8e330652b49f45ea8af3d3247892fc11)

### Legend:

C1-C2: Commercial Districts; D1: Developmental Districts; I1-I2: Industrial Districts.

P1: Professional Districts; R1-R3: Residential District.



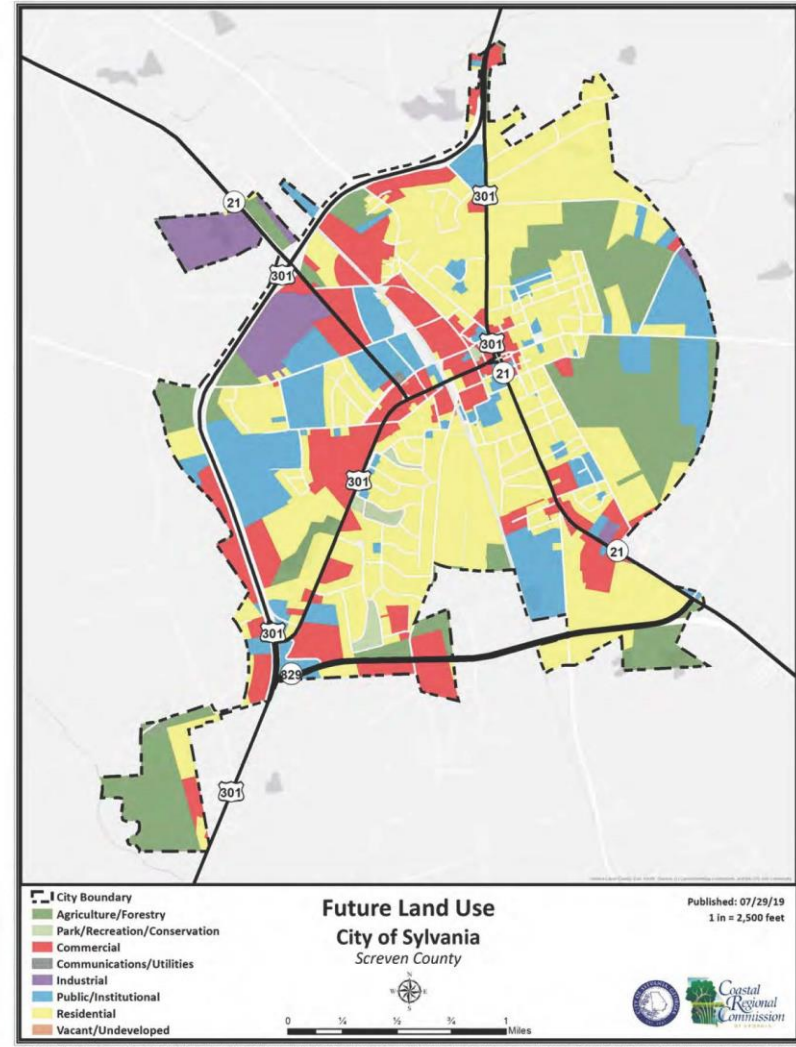
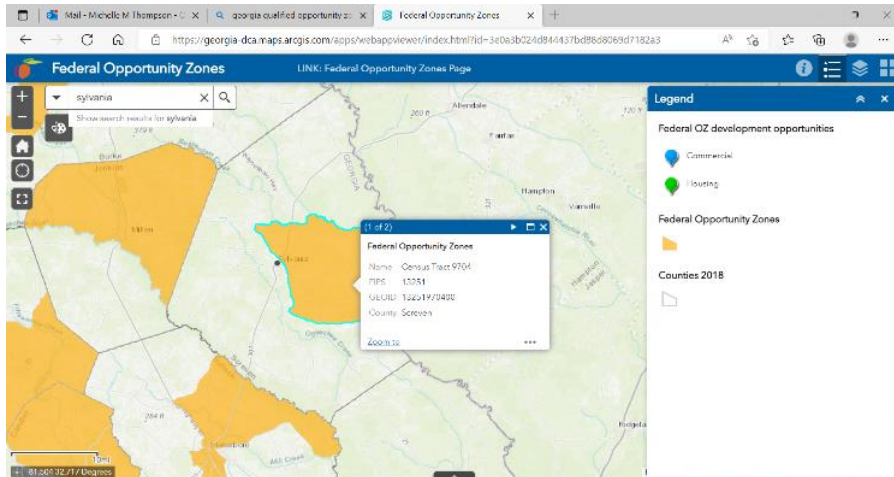


# Future Land Use

The 2020-2040 Screven Joint County Comprehensive Plan suggests future land use for Sylvania with a mix of uses. The majority proposed use as commercial (red), (yellow) is residential, followed by (green) park/recreation/conservation, then (red) commercial then (blue) public/institutional with (purple) industrial in the outer ring.

# Qualified Economic Opportunity Zone

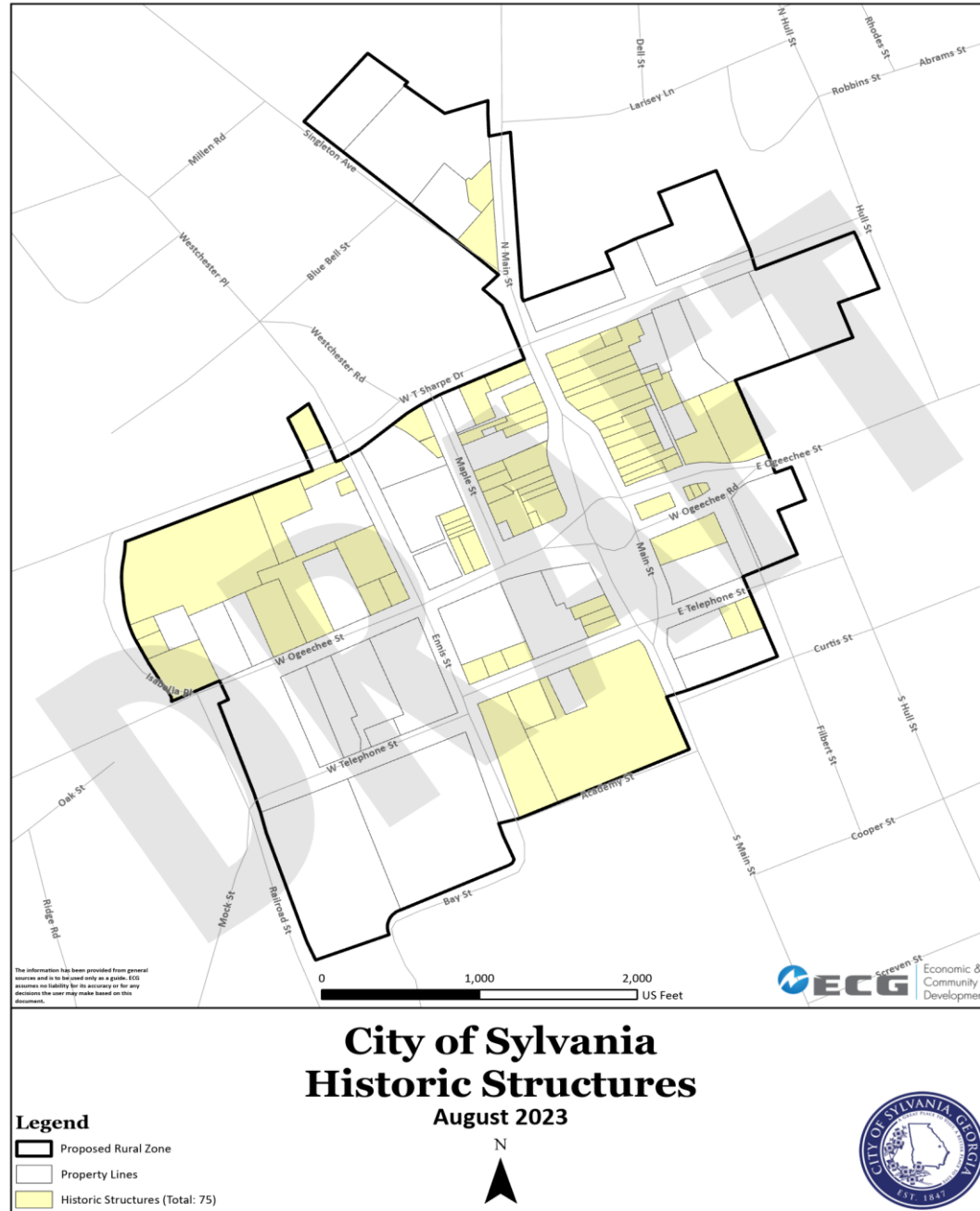
The US Federal *Qualified Economic Opportunity Zone (QOZ)* is “an economically distressed community where new investments, under certain conditions, may be eligible for preferential tax treatment. Localities qualify as QOZs if they were nominated for that designation by a state, ... was certified by the Secretary of the U.S. Treasury via his delegation of authority to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). QOZs were added to the tax code by the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act on December 22, 2017. QOZs are designed to spur economic development by providing tax incentives for investors who invest new capital in businesses operating in one or more QOZs.



# Historic Downtown

Downtown Sylvania has numerous historic structures, defined as structures that are at least 50 years old as of 2023. These structures are found throughout the downtown district and house residential, commercial, religious, and civic uses. The map on this page shows the location of the historic structures in downtown Sylvania. The City of Sylvania does not have a State or Federal Historic District or *Main Street* designation.

## Sample Historic Buildings





# Marquee on Main Historic Building

The image on this page is a concept drawing which depicts what the *Marquee on Main* (107 North Main St) would look like upon restoration. The building will be used for event space and potentially offices. The downtown historic theater was owned by the City and DDA. In 2022, a private investor purchased the theater with plans to develop it into an event venue. The investor was required to put down a nonrefundable deposit of \$25,000. The deal is contingent upon the theater being renovated based on the DDA approved design and the investor has to project completed in March 2024.

MARQUEE ON MAIN  
N. Main Street

Sylvania, GA



**NOT FOR CONSTRUCTION**  
Conceptual only

This drawing was prepared as a conceptual design. It is not intended to be used for construction. The City of Sylvania, Georgia, is not responsible for any errors or omissions in this drawing. For more information, contact the City of Sylvania, Georgia, at 419.231.1234.



City: Sylvania  
Project: Marquee on Main  
107 North Main St.



Project ID: 434035714

Drawn by: MD  
Checked by: CF  
Date: 3/11/19



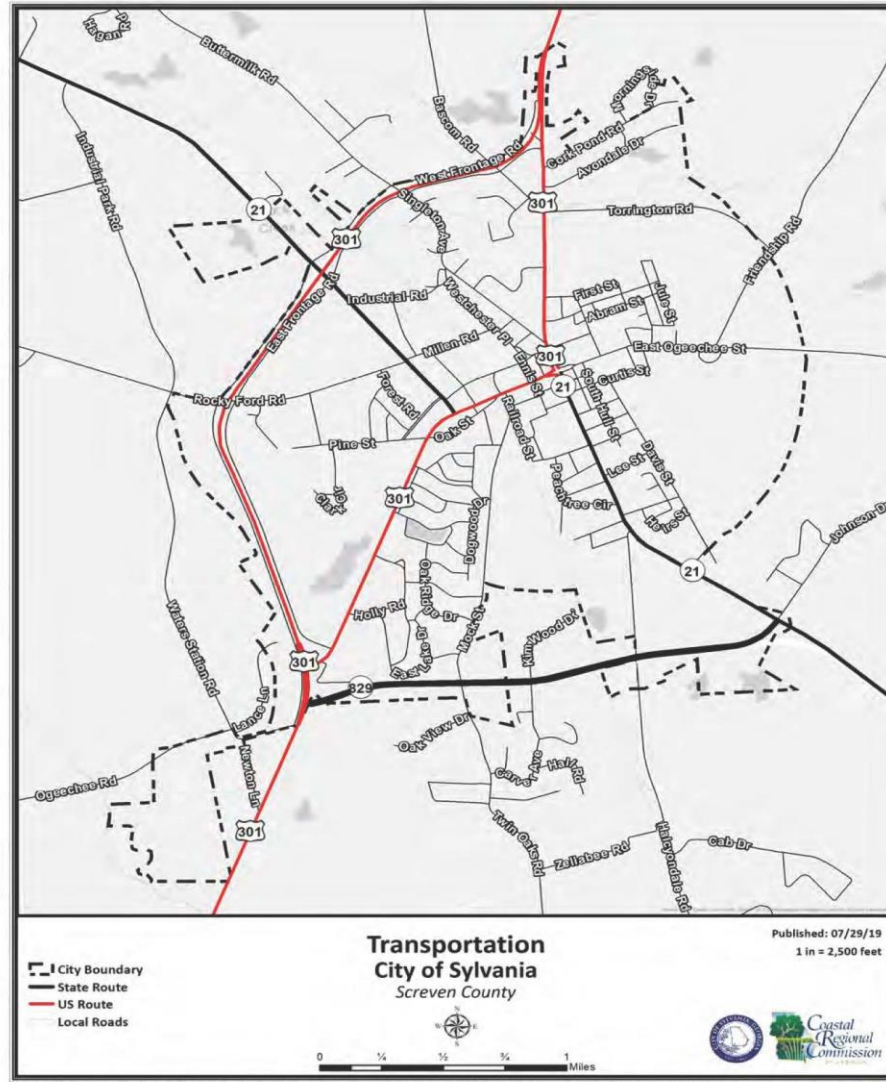
# Mobility, Access, & Connectivity

## Roadways

Downtown Sylvania has a loose, somewhat fragmented street grid with blocks of varying sizes and roads of varying capacities.

The roads through the downtown core are arterials and are designed to provide a high level of access to various destinations in and around Sylvania with minimal traffic impediments. Many of the other remaining roads are local roads that have low speeds and are intended to provide access to residential areas, businesses, and other local places, as shown in the map to the right. The width of the downtown streets accommodates vehicles of various sizes including 8-wheel truck transport.

There are several arterials that provide substantial access to downtown Sylvania from all parts of the city as well as Screven County.



# Traffic

The most heavily traveled roads in downtown Sylvania are Main and West Ogeechee Streets as shown by the average annual daily traffic figures in the adjacent charts with summaries of vehicle trips ranging between 4,528 in 2009 to 6,424 in 2022. The traffic counts do not take into consideration bicycling or other alternative modes of transportation. As expected, these roads experience peak usage in the morning between 7:00 and 8:00 am, at lunch between 12:00 and 1:00 pm and in the evening between 4:00 and 6:00 pm.

The Department of Transportation estimates that in 2003 there were on average 2,000 vehicles on the Route 301 bypass. In 2023, there were approximately 7,000 vehicle trips which did not travel through the downtown.



Average Hourly Volume

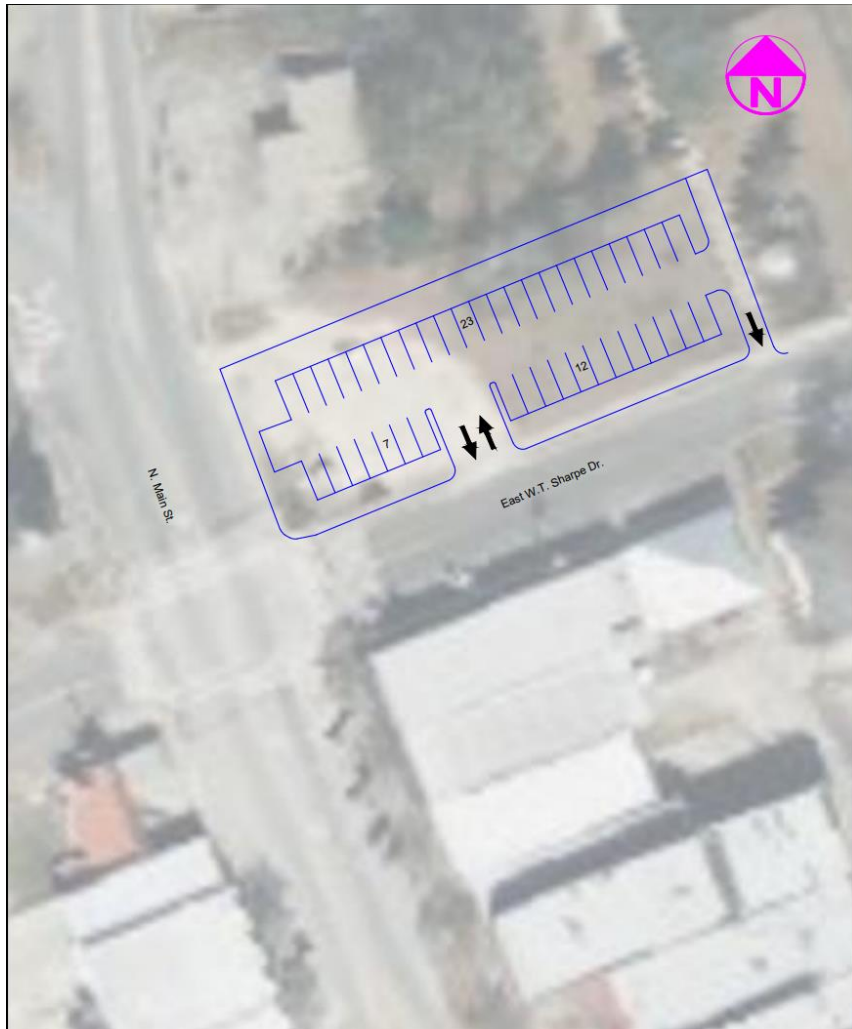
Count History

AADT Trend

Source: [https://gdottrafficdata.drakewell.com/sitedashboard.asp?node=GDOT\\_PORTABLES&cosit=0000251\\_0128](https://gdottrafficdata.drakewell.com/sitedashboard.asp?node=GDOT_PORTABLES&cosit=0000251_0128)



# Parking Facilities



There are 257 marked parking spaces in the downtown. The image to the left suggests parking along Main Street which includes public parking behind the Downtown Development Authority building (center building). Parking is adjacent to the US Post Office and local bank. The parking on to the right along Main Street abuts City Hall in the foreground and commercial properties to the intersection.

On-street parking is centered in the downtown core. There are no garage or elevated parking. The downtown parking needs further study. Parking is an issue identified in both the *2020-2040 Screven Joint County Comprehensive Plan* provided and the *DDA 2023 Downtown Business Survey*.



Drawn by: ASW	<p><b>PRELIMINARY LAYOUT</b></p>	<p><b>DOWNTOWN PARKING</b>                  SYLVANIA, GA                  prepared for:                  CITY OF SYLVANIA</p>		<p>36 Courtland Street, Suite B                  Statesboro, Georgia 30458                  Phone: 912-764-7722                  Fax: 912-764-6960</p>	
Designed by:					
Checked by:					
Scale: 1"=50'					
Prog No. PE23117					
Page:					

# Curbs & Sidewalks

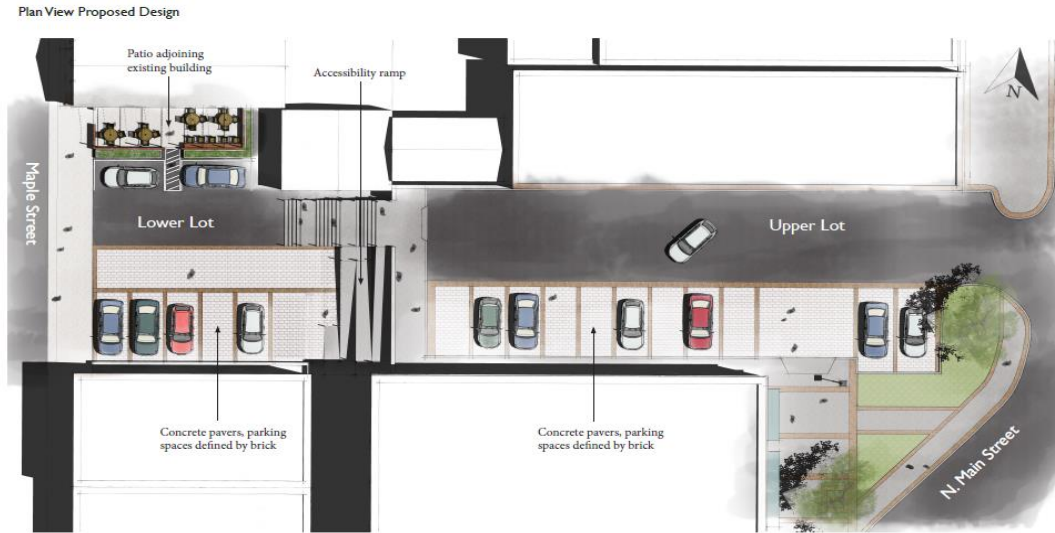
All the downtown does not have curbs and sidewalks nor are they consistent. In the early 2000s the sidewalks in downtown area around the fountain from the intersections of South Main Street and Telephone Street to the North at the intersection of North Main Street and WT Sharp were improved. Improved sidewalks would create a much safer and more attractive pedestrian environment, which would benefit businesses in this area.

The parking revitalization included a redesign of the downtown parking, fountain, and streetscapes. The new sidewalks were widened and lined with brick pavers, lamp posts and new landscaping. Pedestrians most use the renovated area. The city plans to implement a pedestrian corridor for better connection from North Main down to Maple Street.

In 2024 Ennis, Maple and WT Sharpe will be ADA compliant. Design plans are in process for review and approval in 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2023.

## PARKING LOT IMPROVEMENTS N. Main Street/Maple Street

Sylvania, GA



NOT FOR CONSTRUCTION

Geometric Design  
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**GEORGIA**  
PLANNING

City of Sylvania  
Project: N. Main Street/Maple Street

Design provided by  
City of Sylvania  
Community Affairs

Project ID: 41489911

Drawn by: MJD  
Checked by: CF  
Date: 12/7/18

1 of 3



# Character Areas & Traffic Patterns

The 2020-2040 *Screven Joint County Comprehensive Plan* provided an evaluation of *Character Areas* that evaluated priority road connectivity for development of future traffic patterns. The Comprehensive Plan suggests a “Gateway Corridor” plan that mirrors the Route 301 Bypass but provides for an ‘important entrance or means of access to the community.’ The 2023 *Downtown Business Strategic Plan* will address the implementation strategy which includes scenic enhancements and signage.



## Gateway Corridor

### Character Area Description

Developed or open land paralleling the route of a major thoroughfare that serves as an important entrance or means of access to the community.

### Community Vision

Focus on appearance with appropriate signage, landscaping, and other beautification measures.

### Implementation Strategies

- Enact guidelines for new development that enhances the scenic value of the corridor and addresses landscaping and architectural design.
- Manage access to keep traffic flowing; using directory/way-finding signage to clustered developments.
- Retrofit or mask existing strip development or other unsightly features as necessary.

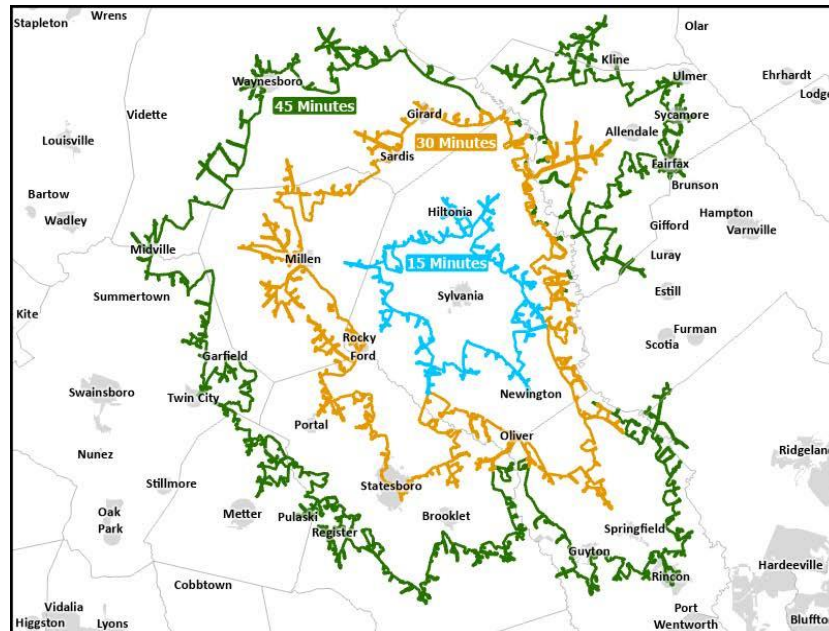


## Market Assessment Overview

The market analysis report is an effort to collect and analyze data and support the Downtown Sylvania Strategic Plan and its recommendations. The report examines Sylvania's Primary, Secondary and Tertiary Market Areas (PMAs). The report also examines consumer characteristics, retail supply, and business potential. This report is a foundation for better understanding the market of downtown Sylvania and identifying potential needs and opportunities. Data and estimates were based on U.S. Census Bureau, Decennial Census (2010, 2020) and Esri Business Analyst. (2022, 2027)

### Primary Retail Area

The primary retail trade area for Sylvania is the 15-minute drive time area from downtown Sylvania, which includes the cities of Sylvania, Hilltonia and Newington. The primary retail trade area has a population of 8,582 as of 2022 and a median household income of \$50,034. Within the area, there is an overall \$20.1 million retail leakage or opportunity. Specific categories of retail and dining experiencing a retail leakage, which may indicate an opportunity for new or expanded businesses in those categories, are Building/Garden Equipment/Supply Stores, Food & Beverage Stores, Clothing & Accessories Stores, Sports/Hobby/Book/Music Stores, and Food Services & Drinking Places.



### Regional Retail Trade Area

The regional retail trade area for Sylvania extends to the 45-minute drive time area from downtown Sylvania. This region represents the potential retail draw area for specialty retail and dining that may not be found in consumers' residential area. The regional retail trade area extends to encompass many Georgia cities including Statesboro, Guyton, Rincon, and various South Carolina cities, as well.

The population within the regional trade area is 136,023 as of 2022, with a median household income of \$51,688, which is slightly higher than the primary trade area and indicates an increased capacity for discretionary spending. The residents of the regional retail trade area make over \$1.14 billion in annual retail purchases, while the retailers in the area had over \$1.26 billion in retail sales, resulting in a retail surplus of about \$122 million. Please see the appendix of this document for the full leakage report for the



## Retail in Downtown Sylvania

The information below summarizes the demographic features of the retail trade areas from ¼ to ½ miles from Downtown Sylvania.

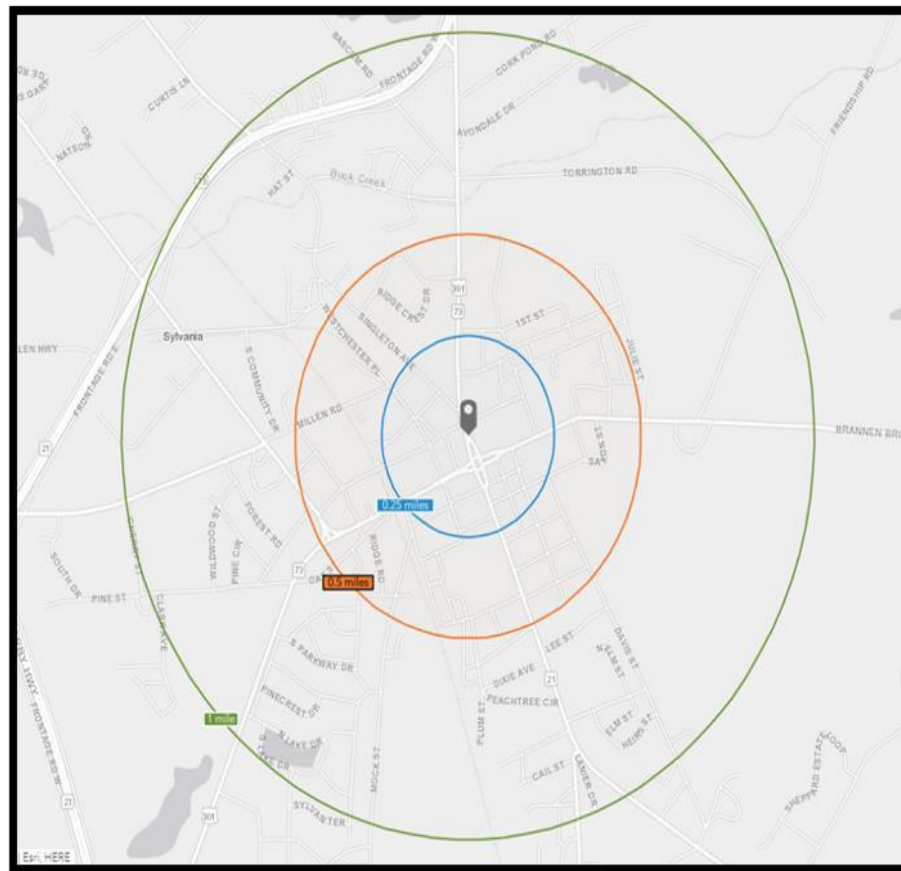
### 0.25 Miles from Downtown Sylvania (inner ring)

Within a quarter mile of Sylvania’s downtown, there are an estimated 212 people with a median age of nearly 38 years old. The median household income for those living within this radius is \$27,646, significantly lower than Georgia’s median household income of \$67,470.

### 0.50 Miles from Downtown Sylvania (middle ring)

Within half of a mile of Sylvania’s downtown, there are an estimated 792 people with a median age of nearly 39 years old. The median household income for those living within this radius is \$29,191, significantly lower than Georgia’s median household income of \$67,470.

Within the area, there is an overall \$7.2 million retail surplus; however, there are three categories experiencing a leakage – Furniture/Home Furnishing Stores, Electronics/Appliances Stores, and Food/Beverage Stores. This may indicate an opportunity for new or expanded businesses in those categories. Please see the Appendix for information on the *2023 Downtown Market Assessment report*.



# Demographic Conditions

## Population

The City of Sylvania’s estimated 2022 population of 2,646 is almost the same as the city’s 2020 population of 2,634. It is projected that the population will stay almost the same over the next five years. Over the period between 2010 and 2022, the populations of Sylvania and Screven County have decreased slightly. In the next five years, the populations of both the city and the county are expected to stay relatively steady.

## Income

Household income can indicate purchasing power and economic potential of a community. As of 2022, the estimated median household income for the City of Sylvania is \$38,847, compared with \$50,485 in Screven County, and \$67,470 in the State of Georgia. The household income distribution is more concentrated at lower income levels in Sylvania and Screven County than it is in the State of Georgia.

## Education Attainment

Educational attainment levels tend to go hand-in-hand with income levels and can impact growth of a community and its recreational spending capacity. The City of Sylvania and Screven County have lower overall levels of educational attainment than the State of Georgia average.

## Age

The median age of Sylvania residents is 40.2 years, which is younger than the Screven County median age of 41.7 years and older than the State of Georgia median age of 37.2 years. By comparing the populations of Sylvania and Screven County it is evident that the age distribution of the county skews slightly older than that of the city.

Population	City of Sylvania	Screven County	State of Georgia
2010 Census	2,679	14,593	9,687,653
2020 Census	2,634	14,067	10,711,908
2022 Estimate	2,646	13,968	10,940,545
2027 Projection	2,620	13,940	11,223,497

Highest Educational Attainment (Population Ages 25+)	City of Sylvania	Screven County	State of Georgia
No High School Diploma	19.4%	15.5%	10.6%
High School Graduate (or GED)	45.2%	41.6%	27.6%
Some College, No Degree	17.2%	20.3%	18.4%
Associate degree	4.2%	6.4%	8.8%
Bachelor’s Degree	10.5%	9.8%	21.3%
Graduate or Professional Degree	3.6%	6.4%	13.3%
High School Graduate or Higher	80.6%	84.5%	89.4%
Bachelor’s Degree or Higher	14.1%	16.2%	34.6%



## Demographics, continued

### Race/Ethnicity

The two main racial groups in Sylvania and Screven County are White and Black, followed by “Two or More Races.” Other racial groups make up a relatively small share of the population. Residents of Hispanic or Latino origin, who can be of any race, make up about 2.5 percent of the population of Sylvania and 2.0 percent of the population of Screven County.

Race/Ethnicity	City of Sylvania	Screven County	State of Georgia
White	48.2%	57.5%	51.4%
Black / African American	44.8%	37.7%	31.0%
American Indian	0.2%	0.4%	0.5%
Asian	1.4%	0.4%	4.6%
Native Hawaiian / Pacific Islander	0.0%	0.1%	0.1%
Some Other Race	1.1%	0.8%	5.3%
Two or More Races	4.4%	3.2%	7.2%
Hispanic / Latino Origin (of Any Race)	2.5%	2.0%	10.6%

### Households

As of 2022, the City of Sylvania has an estimated 1,068 households, which is a slight 0.7 percent decrease from the 2020 Census figure of 1,076 households. From 2010 to 2020, Sylvania experienced a 5.1 percent increase in the number of households. Georgia is expected to see an increase in the number of households in the next five years, while Sylvania will see a slight decrease and Screven County will see a slight increase. Further study on the population changes should be done after the opening of the major industry such as the Hyundai plant.

Households	City of Sylvania	Screven County	State of Georgia
2010 Census	1,024	5,596	3,585,584
2020 Census	1,076	5,646	4,020,808
2022 Estimate	1,068	5,633	4,113,426
2027 Projection	1,062	5,664	4,229,425

### Household Characteristics

In 2022, the estimated average household size in the City of Sylvania and Screven County was 2.44, close to the average household size in the State of Georgia (2.60). Approximately 33.3 percent of Sylvania households have at least one child, which is comparable to Screven County (34.0 percent) and the State of Georgia (32.6 percent).

Household Growth	City of Sylvania	Screven County	State of Georgia
Percent Change: 2010 to 2020	5.1%	0.9%	12.1%
Percent Change: 2020 to 2022	-0.7%	-0.2%	2.3%
Percent Change: 2022 to 2027	-0.6%	0.6%	2.8%

Household Characteristics	City of Sylvania	Screven County	State of Georgia
Average Household Size	2.44	2.44	2.60
% of Households with Children Under Age 18	33.3%	34.0%	32.6%

## Poverty, Disability & Social Characteristics

The percentage of the population living at or below the poverty level in Sylvania and Screven County is slightly higher than the state average at 17 percent and 20.4 percent, respectively. Households receiving Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) or food stamps amount to 21.2 percent and 15.8 percent of Sylvania and Screven County, respectively.

Poverty, Disability, and Social Characteristics	City of Sylvania	Screven County	State of Georgia
Poverty Level (of all people)	17.0%	20.4%	14.3%
Households Receiving Food Stamps/SNAP	21.2%	15.8%	12.2%
Enrolled in Grade 12 (% of total population)	2.0%	1.0%	1.5%
Disconnected Youth*	0.0%	11.8%	3.1%
Children in Single Parent Families (% of all children)	44.4%	56.2%	38.1%
Uninsured	16.5%	13.6%	13.0%
With a Disability, Age 18-64	17.8%	12.8%	10.6%
With a Disability, Age 18-64, Labor Force Participation Rate and Size	19.1%	25.6%	41.0%
Foreign Born	2.1%	1.4%	10.2%
Speak English Less Than Very Well (population 5 yrs and over)	0.7%	0.9%	5.4%

U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates 2016-2020

\*Disconnected Youth are 16–19-year-olds who are (1) not in school, (2) not high school graduates, and (3) either unemployed or not in the labor force.

## Psychographics

Esri produces a psychographic classification system, which categorizes people in each area by their values and purchasing behavior. *Tapestry Segmentation* classifies US neighborhoods into 67 unique segments, based on three indexes displaying average household wealth, socioeconomic status, and housing affordability for the market relative to US standards. The top three tapestry segments within the primary and regional retail trade areas of downtown Sylvania are *Rural Bypass*, *Small Town Sincerity* and *Rooted Rural*. The 45-minute drive time regional trade area characteristics fall under *Rural Bypass*, *Middleburg* and *Southern Satellites*. The segment summary fact sheets can be found here: <https://www.esri.com/en-us/arcgis/products/data/resources>.

## Economic Conditions & Labor Force

About 52.6 percent of the population of Screven County ages 16 and older are in the labor force, which means they are either employed or unemployed and actively seeking work. This is lower than the labor force participation rate\* of the State of Georgia (63.1 percent). The March 2023 unemployment rate in Screven County is 5.7 percent, compared with 3.3 percent in Georgia. The prime-age labor force participation rate\* in Screven County is 71.7 percent, lower than the Georgia rate of 81.1 percent.

Labor Force	City of Sylvania	Screven County	State of Georgia
Labor Force Size (Ages 16 and older)	922	5,960	5,201,775
Labor Force Participation Rate*	44.5%	52.6%	63.1%
Unemployment Rate**	N/A	5.7%	3.3%
Prime-Age Labor Force Size (Ages 25-54)	580	3,642	3,421,408
Prime-Age Labor Force Participation Rate*	75.7%	71.7%	81.1%

*\*The labor force participation rate is defined as the percentage of the civilian population of an area age 16 and older who are in the labor force, which means they are either employed or unemployed and actively seeking work. The prime-age labor force participation rate is defined as the percentage of the civilian population of an area age 25 to 54 who are in the labor force.*

*\*\*Unemployment rate is as of March 2023 and sourced from the Bureau of Labor Statistics Local Area Unemployment Statistics (LAUS).*

## Commute

In 2021, Sylvania and Screven County residents had much higher average commute times at 35.0 and 33.7 minutes, respectively, than Georgia residents at 28.6 minutes. About 79 percent of Sylvania residents with jobs commuted to workplaces outside of the city. For Screven County residents with jobs, about 62 percent commuted to workplaces outside of the county. More workers commute into Sylvania than commute out of Sylvania, resulting in a net commuter inflow. Conversely, Screven County has a net commuter outflow.

## Airline Services

The City of Sylvania hosts the *Plantation AirPark* for private planes and aviation education. The Savannah/Hilton Head airport is within 50 minutes from Sylvania, GA and offers connections to both national and international travel.



# Neighborhood, Business & Community Engagement



# Neighborhood Planning Process

The following summarizes the planning process and community engagement process that occurred during the development of this downtown plan.

August 2022 –  
January 2023



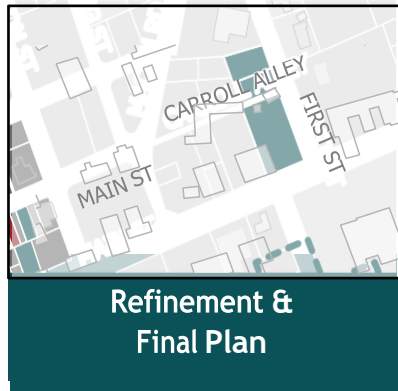
- Sylvania Downtown Development Authority (DDA) conducts normally scheduled business meetings.
- By invitation, Dr. Michelle Thompson led *DDA strategic planning meeting workshop* on January 17, 2023, with Sylvania Downtown Development Authority (DDA) Board and the City of Sylvania.
- DDA Board completes Downtown needs survey and develops plan to revise downtown strategic plan.
- DDA Board provides list of accomplishments from 2019 Downtown Business goals.
- DDA, City of Sylvania and the Screven County Development Authority create pro bono contract for services with Georgia Southern University (GSU) and the University of New Orleans (UNO) to collect data on business needs and opportunities via property condition/use survey and assisting with a downtown business survey (online and in- person).
- The *Sylvania/Screven County & Downtown Development Authority Public Participation Geographic Information Systems (S/SD PPGIS)* project was launched in August 2023.
- Technology GSU student team & GSU/UNO Professors conduct initial site visits and walking tours to analyze physical conditions of downtown Sylvania.

February –  
May 2023



- DDA Committee and Sub-Committees met to evaluate top priority needs.
- DDA held meetings with stakeholder individual and groups to discuss desired downtown land uses, locations, and concepts.
- DDA collected feedback from *Downtown Business Survey* for downtown needs & design.
- Held Community Meeting on April 19, 2023 with City of Sylvania to invite community review and comment on draft *2023 Downtown Business Strategic Plan*.

June –  
August 2023



- Finalized report on downtown quality, condition and status for DDA needs analysis and for development of the 2024 *Rural Zone* application submission.
- Determined final recommendations based upon community input, business survey and community meeting feedback forms in person and internet.
- 2023 Downtown Business Strategic Work Plan outline DDA adopted final plan in July.
- Sylvania City Council acknowledges 2023 Downtown Business Strategic Work Plan in public meeting in July 2023.
- Work Plan posted on City of Sylvania and DDA websites for public access.

# DDA Board Survey & SWOT Analysis

During the January 2023, DDA monthly meeting the DDA Board discussed updating the *2019 Economic Development Strategic Plan* and submission of the 2024 GA *Rural Zone* tax credit. The joint meeting with the City of Sylvania, Screven County Development Authority and the Sylvania DDA, included a presentation by Dr. Michelle Thomson (University of New Orleans) to discuss the strategic plan process, downtown development plans, conduct a Board questionnaire, complete *SWOT* analysis and develop a timeline. The Board questionnaire aided the Downtown Development Authority Board to update the vision plan for future socio-economic plans and strategies for Sylvania, GA. Outlined below are the results of DDA Board questionnaire and results from the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities & Threats (SWOT) analysis.

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## *Downtown Development Authority Board Questionnaire*

1. What are the greatest strengths of the Sylvania Downtown Development Authority (DDA)?
  - Local people who want to prosper, trusting and love town
  - Diverse background with community knowledge/hometown
  - New director
  - Intentional actions
  - Strong partnerships (city, chamber, etc.)
  - Great size board
  
2. What DDA challenges need to be addressed? What are possible solutions?
  - Board participation – (connect with members to see why they can't attend and see if adjustments can be made to better accommodate)
  - Need a growth mentality – (better marketing)
  - Limited funding – (explore available funding & ways to get funding)
  - Need to make personal connections.
  
3. What are the greatest *assets* of downtown Sylvania?
  - One stop shop, flagship businesses (IGA, Drug store, Banks)
  - Great infrastructure, walkability, cleanliness, affordable compared to neighboring communities.
  - History
  - Potential downtown living
  - Farmers Market
  - Future event space



4. What are the greatest *liabilities* of downtown Sylvania?

- Absentee owners
- Minimal to no after 5 activities
- Parking
- Traffic crosswalks
- Bypass takes traffic/better signage.
- Code enforcement
- Historic buildings

5. What are the greatest *opportunities* of downtown Sylvania?

- Growth in the region
- Located out of the hustle/bustle (between Savannah/Augusta/Statesboro)
- Passthrough community
- EV charging station
- Creating after 5 environment – dining /lodging
- Engaging real estate agents to promote downtown properties.

6. What are the greatest *challenges* of downtown Sylvania?

- Keeping set business hours (plan more events to give reasons to stay open)
- Transient people (talk to city/county to help address this issue)
- Absentee property owners (city to hire zoning/code enforcement to help address concerns)
- Getting people to invest in downtown (create more incentives to invest and better marketing)

7. As You Visualize a Successful Downtown District, List 5 Qualities/Characteristics It needs to possess – how will it look, feel, function?

- a. Interactive & welcoming downtown (free wifi)
- b. Visual connection to all of town
- c. Vibrancy and sharing (stories on the square, etc.), lots of people.
- d. Diverse businesses in renovated buildings at capacity
- e. Clean, landscaped, cared for, parks, sidewalks, good infrastructure.

8. What are the top Design *challenges*?

- Parking (city has plans to build more parking and DDA will support that effort)
- utilizing alley ways (brainstorm with merchant to see how these can be better used)
- Maintaining historic appearance (incentives/facade grants to encourage investment)

9. What are the top Design *opportunities*?

- Develop pedestrian corridor.
- Murals & art downtown (hydrant)
- More ways to incorporate & use farmers market area.

10. What are the top Economic Vitality challenges?

- Need more industrial development to bring more jobs (support IDA by encouraging investment in downtown)
- Limited entrepreneur spirit (do more outreach to surrounding counties, colleges & technical school)
- Business not doing marketing. (offer training to encourage online and social media marketing)

11. What are the top Organizational challenges?

- Volunteer board – limited participation (contact all members to get commitment or replace on board)
- Limited budget (as we get renewed interest in downtown go to city council for financial support)
- Lack merchant participation. (survey to see what they want and continue to make personal contacts)
- Identity

12. What are the top Promotional challenges?

- No marketing plan and signage (this addressed in our workplan)

13. Please share any ideas on how to improve and/or promote the Downtown?

- Apply for rural zone designation.
- Better promotional materials to include incentives, etc.
- Better signage along bypass and into town
- More events in downtown
- Supply promotional materials to recreation dept, hotels, etc.
- Survey the public to see what they want.

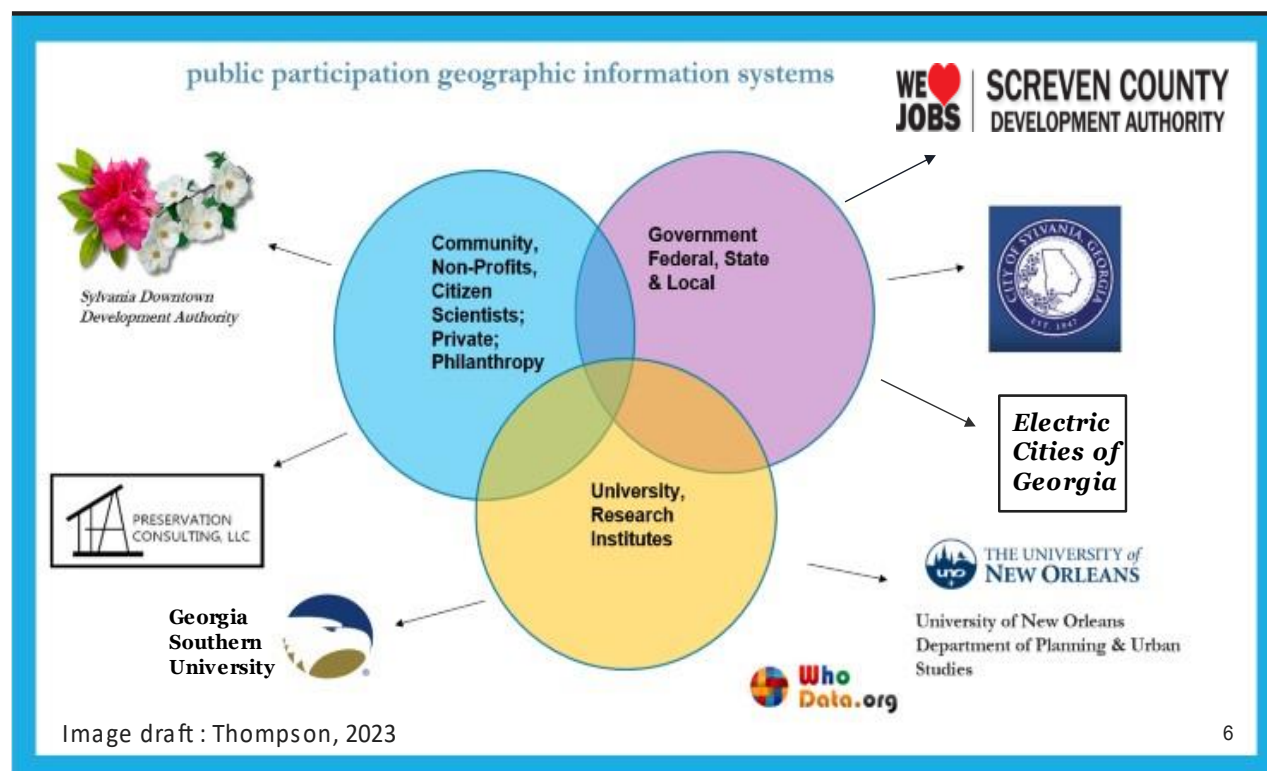
## Applied Public Participation Geographic Information Systems (PPGIS)

One of the recommendations from the 2019 plan was to work with colleges or universities to “work for your strategic plan priorities.” (DDA, 2019) In August 2022, the City of Sylvania, Screven County Development Authority & Sylvania Downtown Development Authority launched a *Public Participation Geographic Information Systems (PPGIS)* project with Georgia Southern University and the University of New Orleans. The *S/SD PPGIS* project developed a community led (DDA) partnership with the City of Sylvania/Screven County Development Authority to re-visit the policies, plans and goals of the Downtown Development Plan. The volunteer University partners provided pro bono geospatial downtown assessments, socio-economic development and technical services to create data that would inform the 2023 Sylvania Downtown Development Strategic Plan and the proposed 2024 Rural Zone Application.

Georgia Southern University students in the Department of Geology and Geography, in the College of Science and Mathematics, presented the results of their 2022-2023 Public Participation Geographic Information Systems (PPGIS) research project at a community meeting on Wednesday April 19, 2023, in Sylvania, GA. Kelsie Floyd and Austin Abarr, Master of Science in Applied Geography (MSAG) students and Rebecca Neely, undergraduate BA Geography major have been working on a community-engaged research project in collaboration with the city of Sylvania, the city’s Downtown Development Authority, Screven County Development Authority, and the Planning and Urban Studies (PLUS) program at the University of New Orleans (UNO).

Under the guidance of Dr. Michelle Thompson (UNO), Dr. Rob Yarbrough (GS), Dr. Munshi Rahman (GS), Dr. Amy Potter (GS) and PhD in Urban Studies student Jennie Garcia (UNO), the overarching goals of this PPGIS project are to provide Geographic Information Systems (GIS) services to these community partners,

in collaboration with municipal leaders, local business owners, and the broader communities in Sylvania and Screven County. These GIS services are an invaluable component of Sylvania’s Downtown Strategic Plan and for achieving the city and county’s overall economic development objectives.





## Downtown Business Survey

Both online and in-person surveys intended to gather general feedback about downtown Sylvania and business needs were available from April to June 2023. Announcements about the availability of the survey were made in the media and public meetings. A total of 50 surveys were sent via email in March 2023. Paper copies were delivered to 20 businesses whose emails returned. The survey focused on both public infrastructure, services, what existing private businesses needed in downtown Sylvania, and what they would like to see improve about downtown Sylvania. The survey was not anonymous since contact information was requested.

### *What improvements do you want to see in downtown Sylvania?*

#### **Restaurants**

There is a need for more restaurants in downtown Sylvania. People expressed the need for restaurants with different menus and with a range of price points. People also expressed their desire for more local restaurants in downtown, but ultimately, they just want more options for dining in downtown Sylvania, particularly for lunch and dinner.

#### **Retail**

People also want more shopping options that provide a wider range of products. Several people also felt that the current retail offerings in downtown Sylvania feel very limited and do not provide goods for the broader population.

#### **Entertainment and Events**

Many people noted the need for more entertainment and events in downtown Sylvania. They want more events, particularly in the cooler months and in the evenings. People also noted a need for more family- and kid-friendly events. The revival of the *Marquee on Main* as a space that provide more social interaction were suggested. Suggestions for events such as live music was also suggested.

#### **Extended Hours**

Some survey responses had interest in businesses being open later, including shops and restaurants. Multiple people noted that downtown Sylvania is very quiet after 5:00 pm, and they would like to have more options in the evening. Many others noted that the retail shops are not open in the evening, and therefore, many of those that work traditional hours, and have a long commute, are not able to enjoy Sylvania's shopping options.

#### **Parking**

The desire for more parking spaces was mentioned as a high priority. There were multiple suggestions that people who work in the businesses should not take up the parking closest to store fronts.

#### **Design**

Respondents mentioned that they liked the historic feel and character of the buildings and would like to see improvements to the condition and design character in downtown. Several people mentioned the need to continue façade improvements and renovations to all buildings while others noted that they would like to see improved lighting downtown. Some noted an interest in more planters and flowers in downtown. The fountain should be on more often.

## **Future of Downtown**

A city's downtown has long been considered the heart of the community: a place where business happens, locals meet and travelers get a sense of the town they're passing through. Downtown Sylvania is a diverse and welcoming destination where people live, work and play. The vision blends economic and community development creating an environment that will grow and sustain a prosperous community while maintaining the best small-town characteristics.

Sylvania Downtown has a bright future that without the Downtown Development Authority's Strategic Plan and Work Plan would not happen. It's obvious by this plan how much time, effort and love has been put into helping "put the heart back in downtown". Without the push to get the rural zone designation this strategic plan may not have been as successful. It has revealed many opportunities that we can only grow from and has shown us the need to do a better job marketing downtown's assets. With a strong marketing plan and a rural zone designation to add to our incentive package this will encourage invest in existing and new businesses to the downtown. The RZ designation will become part of the city, state and quasi-private incentives and not a stand-alone solution. The success of the application will give the city another way to brand the community as 'innovative' and 'entrepreneurial' in a tangible way.

The City of Sylvania and DDA have a goal to increase employment in the downtown by 10% based upon readiness of projects in development within Central Business District and proposed Rural Zone. The City of Sylvania and DDA have a goal to decrease blight by 20% in 2024 and an additional 15% in 2025 based upon the comprehensive business recruitment and retention strategies developed in the 2023 Downtown Business Strategic Plan, the 2020-2040 Sylvania County Comprehensive Plan and Chamber of Commerce business plan. The Rural Zone designation will be a key part in the implementation of the plans.

# Appendix

2023 Downtown Business Strategic Work Plan  
Sylvania Market Assessment (ECG)



**2023 SYLVANIA DOWNTOWN BUSINESS STRATEGIC WORK PLAN (FINAL)**

Sylvania Downtown Development Authority

July 17, 2023

**Sylvania Downtown Development Authority Sylvania Vision:** Downtown Sylvania is a diverse and welcoming destination where people live, work and play. The vision blends economic and community development creating an environment that will grow and sustain a prosperous community while maintaining the best small-town characteristics.

**PRIORITY ONE – “Dining, Retail, and Commercial”**

**Goals:** 1. Attract businesses for empty buildings. 2. Retain existing businesses.

**Objective 1.** Update the Sylvania Downtown Business Incentive Package.

The Sylvania Downtown Business Incentive Package has been updated with contact information, program summary, requirements and submission guidelines. The current incentive package will expire on 5/31/24. Any changes to the plan will be approved by the Downtown Development Authority (DDA) then presented to the City Council for adoption.

**Objective 2.** Apply for Rural Zone designation through the GA Department of Community Affairs (DCA).

Work with the City of Sylvania to complete the 2024 Rural Zone application for submission in August 2023.

**Objective 3.** Engage real estate agents and financial institutions in Screven County and surrounding areas to promote downtown properties.

Meet periodically with the Sylvania/Screven County real estate agents and Sylvania banks to share flyers and educate on the DDA goals and plans.

A listing of real estate agents, financial institutions, CPA firms, Attorneys, and investors in Screven, Bulloch, Effingham, Chatham, Richmond and other counties is being reviewed and further developed.

**Objective 4.** Update the Downtown Façade Grant Program. The Façade Grant Program does not have a program expiration date. The program criteria are under review with a goal to complete this in September 2023. There may be grant amount increases, program structure and grant requirement changes. Any changes are at the discretion of the DDA Board.

**Objective 5.** Provide a ‘*How to Start and Grow a Business in Sylvania*’ for new and existing businesses.

Currently the information is located on the “Resources” tab of the DDA website. The website information will be updated and formatted in consistent fonts, etc. The website version will be printable, and a print version will also be developed. Add a link from the City of Sylvania website to the “Resource” page of the DDA website.

**Milestone(s):** Share the “*How to Start and Grow a Business in Sylvania*” brochure that has description and links to all updated information on local and state business start-up and existing business expansion resources.

Host an *Opportunity Night* to showcase downtown opportunities and available buildings; planned for October 10,2023; a walking tour map will be provided for attendees; DDA will work with property owners to develop ‘property brochures’ with amenities, rent rate range, sale pricing, square footage, zoning, ADA compliance, availability, Screven Assessor property information, property owner contact information; Audience: investors, bankers, chamber of commerce members, and real estate professionals.

**PRIORITY TWO – “Design and Appearance”**

**Goals:** Attract individuals and businesses into the downtown by ensuring a safe environment, making Sylvania inviting and promote as a tourist destination.

**Objective 1.** Recommend to City additional parking designs and develop of the pedestrian corridor which would help connect the Main Street shopping area to the Maple/Ennis Streets areas.

**Objective 2.** Work with Department of Transportation (DOT) and City of Sylvania to implement new signage along the bypass and in downtown.

The team will evaluate entrances into downtown consisting of South Main Street, North Main Street, East and West Ogeechee streets for pedestrian and vehicle traffic. After evaluation, we will research other downtowns for best practices and signage examples.

DOT will be contacted to research procedures for placing signs along state highways in the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2023 and report back to the DDA. Create a new timeline and develop a proposal for submission to the DOT before January 2024.

Guidelines: [https://www.dot.ga.gov/PartnerSmart/DesignManuals/smguide/GDOT\\_Signing\\_and\\_Marking\\_Guide\\_printerfriendly.pdf](https://www.dot.ga.gov/PartnerSmart/DesignManuals/smguide/GDOT_Signing_and_Marking_Guide_printerfriendly.pdf)

**Objective 3.** Develop a process for the DDA to notify the City of Sylvania of possible code violations.

The City of Sylvania has hired a Code Enforcement & Zoning Officer to develop this process. DDA will meet with CD & ZO to discuss process and share with Downtown merchants. The DDA will work with businesses to identify local or state programs for physical improvements.

**Objective 4.** Research installation of Electric Vehicle (EV) charging station in Downtown.

City of Sylvania has completed initial research and obtained guidance from the Electric Cities of Georgia (ECG).

During the 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter of 2023, the DDA and City of Sylvania will meet with the GA Department of Transportation (DOT) on program guidance and/or Federal incentives for installation.

In the 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2023, the DDA will provide the City Council and DDA with a preliminary design, cost to install, maintenance fees, City subsidy on electric, safety and liability.

**Milestone:** Make recommendations of proposed signage in Downtown and along the bypass. Installation by 1<sup>st</sup> quarter 2024.

**PRIORITY THREE – Marketing Plan**

**Goal:** Develop a media plan including a schedule of face-to-face interactions to communicate the purpose of the DDA, resources available for merchants and start-ups, opportunities for developers/merchants/entrepreneurs and the accomplishments of the DDA.

**Objective 1.** Expand social media and print presence.

**Objective 2.** Link the Downtown Development Authority website to the City of Sylvania website.

**Objective 3.** Promote the Business Incentive Plan through updating media links and notices on social media. (3<sup>rd</sup> quarter 2023)

**Objective 4.** Promote Downtown living by creating a '15-minute' live, work and play marketing strategy. (last quarter 2023)

**Objective 5.** Promote Façade Grant Program by PSA of new program roll-out in September 2023.

**Objective 6.** Develop communication plan to promote downtown and the DDA with preliminary plan shared with downtown businesses in 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2023.

**Objective 7.** Incorporate brand standards for all DT and DDA marketing materials with draft by 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2023 approved. This includes a consistent logo, color scheme and fonts.

**Objective 8.** Impact of Media will be reported to the DDA Board monthly. Diagnostic report on 'hits' can be measure of impact. Consider expanding social media beyond Facebook.

**Objective 9.** Notice on the DDA website that minutes of meetings are available upon request. Currently, the information is located on the "Resource" tab of the DDA Website.

The website information will be updated and formatted in consistent fonts, etc. The web site version will be printable, and a print version will also be developed.

**Objective 10:** Reach out to Georgia Department of Economic Development to discuss Sylvania projects, programs and business development goals.

**Milestone:**

Media updates and impact analysis will be completed, and reported to DDA Board, monthly.

Expand social platforms; program updates or new announcements will be shared with wider media.

**PRIORITY FOUR: Engage Downtown Merchants**

**Goal:** Create a partnership between the merchants and DDA Board to increase merchant participation and support.

**Objective 1.** Board members make personal connections with the merchants monthly. Report back to DDA with suggestions/requests.

Follow-up will be provided by the DDA Executive Director who will report back in DDA meeting and describe action plan in minutes.

If the DDA adopts the recommendations, then the strategic plan must be modified and updated on social media platforms.

Notification of merchant-led initiatives will be shared back with the downtown merchants.

**Objective 2.** Provide education for merchants regarding the purpose of the DDA. Fall and spring roundtable/breakfast in collaboration with the Chamber of Commerce.

Education and visits to include updates on downtown activity, new businesses, and resources available.

Share information about the office hours of the DDA and/or contact information. Share DDA incentive program brochures with businesses that are being recruited or recently opened in the downtown. Update marketing materials on social media to include both local and state business start-up programs and how the DDA can help fulfill these needs.

**Objective 3.** Survey the merchants, soliciting ideas on what their business needs are, what improvements or changes are needed and obtain suggestions on how to increase marketability.

**Objective 4.** Create a business survey with input from the City of Sylvania. Improve the survey metrics and outreach using multiple survey methods including internet, mailed, hand-delivered, public notice and in-person interviews.

**Milestone:**

Completion of the merchant survey and have open meeting to review and discuss results.

Provide a report out in fall 2023 DDA report and invite Downtown businesses for input and action plan, next steps.



<b>2023 STRATEGIC WORK PLAN</b>				
Sylvania Downtown Development Authority				
<b>Priority: Dining, Retail, Commercial</b>				
<b>Committee Member Lead:</b> Brooke Lawn/Kylie Forehand				
<b>Goal:</b> Attract new business and retain existing business				
<b>Action Steps</b>	<b>Person Responsible</b>	<b>Due Date</b>	<b>Partners &amp; Resources</b>	<b>Update</b>
Update <i>Business Incentive Plan</i>	Stacy Mathis ( <i>City Liaison</i> ) Hugh Hunter Michel Wrachford Dorie Bacon	8/2023	City of Sylvania Downtown Development Authority	7/23: Report on updated contacts and marketing plan design to finalize. Evaluated similar city marketing plans to see if there are other programs that could be developed, considering Statesboro, Springfield and Madison GA.
Apply for <i>Rural Zone Designation</i>	Stacy Mathis	8/2023	Dr. Michelle Thompson City of Sylvania Downtown Development Authority Electric Cities of Georgia	7/23: Application in process for submission in August 2023.
Engage real estate agents and financial institutions in Screven Co. and surrounding counties	Brooke Lawn Dorie Bacon Angie Johnson	8/2023	Chamber Members – Caitlyn Harley - Georgia Real Estate & Management, Craig Lariscy - Zillow Premier Agent, Megan - Woodall Georgia Real Estate & Management, Sheppard Pace Real Estate, Bank of Newington, F&M Bank, Queensborough Bank.  Alyce Thornhill, Director of Project Implementation & Supplier Strategy for the Georgia Department of Economic Development.	Board Committee will describe incentive plan, vacant parcels; will coordinate information with the city when permits have been approved.  Information session on Incentives, available properties and DDA marketing materials; flyers provided; quarterly report to GA Realtors Association to promote the Downtown.
Update the DDA Façade Grant Program	Dorie Bacon Michael Wrachford Hugh Hunter	9/2023	Other communities with Façade grants	Review will include consideration for funding amounts, schedules, improvement qualifications, and reporting.
<i>“How to Start and Grow a Business in Sylvania”</i> for new and existing businesses	Kylie Forehand Stacy Mathis Michael Wrachford	8/2023	City of Sylvania Downtown Development Authority Screven County	Resource is currently located on the DDA website. Being updated to add information related to zoning, ordinances, contact and provide a more cohesive look. Will be made easily printable from the website and provided in hard copy.

<b>2023 STRATEGIC WORK PLAN</b> Sylvania Downtown Development Authority				
<b>Priority:</b> Design and Appearance <b>Committee Member Lead:</b> Preston Dees <b>Goal:</b> Attract individuals and businesses into the downtown by ensuring a safe environment and making it an inviting destination.				
<b>Action Steps</b>	<b>Person Responsible</b>	<b>Due Date</b>	<b>Partners &amp; Resources</b>	<b>Update</b>
Parking design recommendations	Stacy Mathis Michael Wrachford	10/2023	City of Sylvania	7/23: Option one: would not sell so city is moving on to Option 2 near farmers market area.
Pedestrian Corridor	Stacy Mathis Michael Wrachford	ongoing	City of Sylvania	7/23: City is working on funding. Transportation Alternatives (TA) Program: <a href="https://www.dot.ga.gov/GDOT/Pages/TAP.aspx">https://www.dot.ga.gov/GDOT/Pages/TAP.aspx</a> The TA program grant from GA Department of Transportation (DOT) has been awarded to the city to provide engineering for Maple Street & Ennis development \$280,000.  The TA program grant from DOT will be applied for in 2025 to develop sidewalks, lighting for other infrastructure for Maple Street & Ennis. Amount to be determined.
Bypass and Downtown Signage	Stacy Mathis Michael Wrachford	10/2023	City of Sylvania Department of Transportation	7/23: Collecting examples of signage from other communities, plan to walk downtown to analyze signage.
Code Enforcement Implementation	Angie Johnson Michael Wrachford Hugh Hunter	8/2023	City of Sylvania	7/17: city employee Stephanie Lee will be full time employee for Zoning administration and Code Enforcement.
Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Station	Stacy Mathis	ongoing	Kylie Forehand Electric Cities of Georgia Infrastructure Bill	Stacy met with a company and received several options to incorporate in downtown. Following up with Sylvania Electric Department on best locations.

**Priority – Engage Downtown Merchants**  
**Committee Member Lead: Kylie Forehand**

Action Steps	Person Responsible	Due Date	Partners & Resources	Update
Board member connections with merchants	Kylie Forehand DDA Board	Ongoing	DDA Marketing Plan DDA Board Chamber of Commerce	DDA Board will coordinate plans and processes with the Chamber of Commerce as part of the marketing plan.
DDA education for merchants	Kylie Forehand	Spring Event Fall Event	DDA Marketing Plan Georgia Government Agencies Chamber of Commerce	Education and visits to include updates around DT activity, new businesses, and available resources. Consider Breakfast Roundtables.
Merchant Survey	Kylie Forehand Dr. Michelle Thompson	Completed	DDA Board Chamber of Commerce	The Merchant Survey will be ongoing annually.

**2023 STRATEGIC WORK PLAN**  
 Sylvania Downtown Development Authority

**Priority: DDA Marketing Plan**  
**Committee Member Lead: Dorie Bacon**

**Goal:** Develop media plan as well face to face interactions to communicate the purpose of the DDA, resources available for merchants and start-ups, opportunities for developers/merchants/entrepreneurs and the accomplishments of the DDA.

Action Steps	Person Responsible	Due Date	Partners & Resources	Update
Develop a social media and print communication schedule	Kylie Forehand Dorie Bacon	3 <sup>rd</sup> quarter 2023	The Sylvania Times Facebook Instagram Web Screven County Observer	Hits and views will be measured monthly and reported to the DDA board at monthly meetings.
Combine the DDA website with the City of Sylvania site and maintain content	Kylie Forehand Stacy Mathis	3 <sup>rd</sup> quarter 2023	City of Sylvania	5/23 Updated correct link on City site to DDA
Develop print and media schedule for promotion of downtown living	Stacy Mathis	10/2023	The Sylvania Times Facebook Instagram Web Screven County Observer	



Develop print and media schedule for promotion of Business Incentive Plan	Dorie Bacon	10/2023	The Sylvania Times Facebook Instagram Web Screven County Observer	
Develop print and media schedule for promotion of Façade Grant Program	Stacy Mathis	10/2023	The Sylvania Times Facebook Instagram Web	
Develop print and media schedule for promotion of available businesses and buildings	Dorie Bacon Dr. Michelle Thompson	3 <sup>rd</sup> quarter 2023	The Sylvania Times Facebook Instagram Web Screven County Observer	
Outline DDA visitation with merchants	Kylie Forehand Angie Johnson	10/2023	DDA Board Chamber of Commerce	
Develop elevator speech for DDA board members	Michael Wrachford Brooke Lawn	10/2023	DDA Board	
Develop brand standards for all material	Brooke Lawn	8/2023	DDA Board	7/10/23: The DDA board voted to maintain the existing DDA logo and explore different versions of it. Dominate colors for material will be red, black and white and the 2 fonts will be approved to include <i>Times New Roman</i> and one additional.

**Note: Voted and Approved in DDA meeting on Monday/17 July 2023**

# City of Sylvania Market Assessment

The City of Sylvania *2023 Downtown Market Assessment* was created by the Electric Cities of Georgia. A copy of the complete report is available upon request from the City of Sylvania and also downloadable from the City website: <https://www.cityofsylvaniaga.com/index.cfm>.



## Downtown Market Assessment

*Sylvania, Georgia*

July 6, 2023

*Prepared on behalf of  
City of Sylvania, Georgia*

*Prepared by  
ECG Office of Economic & Community Development*



City of Sylvania, Screven County Development Authority, Downtown Development Authority  
Public Participation Geographic Information Systems Geographic Information Systems Project Team



(From Left to Right) Dr. Robert Yarbrough, Brooke Lawn, Austin Abarr, Kelsie Floyd, Rebecca Neely, Dr. Michelle Thompson, Sylvania Mayor, Preston Dees, Sylvania City Manager, Mathis and City of Sylvania Downtown Development Authority Director, Kylie Forehand. (Photo by Ben Counts. April 19, 2023)

Team members not featured: Rachel Barnwell, Jennie Garcia, Dr. Amy Potter, Dr. Munshi Rahman

Source: *“PPGIS PROJECT PRESENTATION BRINGS MANY INTERESTED CITIZENS OUT”* by Ben Counts, Screven County Observer (4/21/23); <https://thescrevencountyobserver.com/2023/04/21/ppgis-project-presentation-brings-many-interested-citizens-out/>